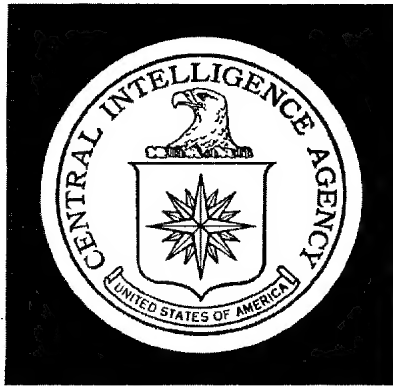


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(57)



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

ARMY review(s)

State Dept. review

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HIGHLIGHTS

Military activity in South Vietnam remained at a low ebb over the weekend amid continuing indications that the Communists are planning a major offensive campaign in the northern provinces as well as intensive small-scale activity in the western highlands region.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
US Marine and ARVN engineer units have reportedly begun construction of a fortified barrier just south of the DMZ in northeastern Quang Tri Province to impede continuing NVA infiltration across the formerly neutral buffer zone (Paras. 2-3).

An analysis of recent Communist main force unit activity in the western highlands of South Vietnam suggests an enemy strategy of maneuver and attrition against allied units operating in that region (Paras. 8-12).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Phan Khac Suu was re-elected as chairman of the Constituent Assembly on 14 April (Paras. 1-2). It appears that Viet Cong activity was stepped up slightly in response to Sunday's local elections (Para. 3). The central Vietnam Dai Viet political party is in the midst of preparations for presidential and legislative elections (Paras. 4-5).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
Current speculation in the Hanoi diplomatic community about the reason for Pham Van Dong's trip to Moscow includes the possibility that he was seeking surface-to-surface missiles (Paras. 1-2).

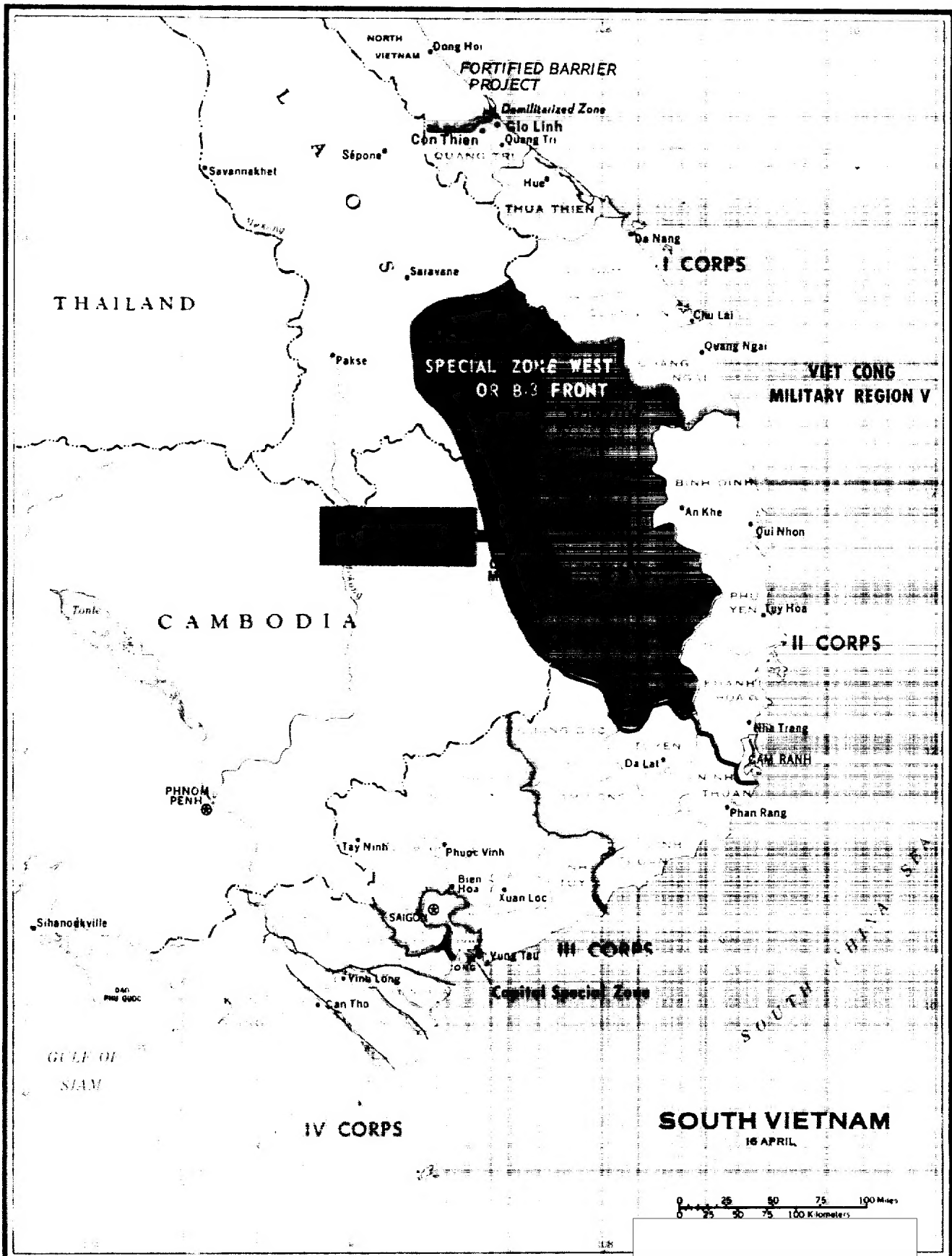
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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi
has rejected a recent Canadian peace proposal
(Paras. 1-2).

VI. Other Major Aspects: The Communists are
making preparations to keep roads in the Laos
panhandle open during the coming rainy season
(Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. No major ground engagements were reported in South Vietnam during the past weekend.

2. In an effort to impede the continuing flow of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), US Marine and ARVN engineer battalions have reportedly begun the construction of a fortified barrier just south of the DMZ in northernmost Quang Tri Province.

3. Present plans, according to unconfirmed press reports, call for clearing a "free-fire zone" approximately one mile below the southern boundary of the six-mile-wide DMZ and extending from Gio Linh some 18 miles westward to Con Thien. The fortified barrier, which will consist of mines, barbed wire, and bunker defenses, reportedly may eventually encompass the entire 35-mile length of the buffer zone between the two Vietnams. The project also includes the evacuation and relocation of an estimated 20,000 South Vietnamese civilians residing in the area.

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Communist Strategy in the Western Highlands

8. Communist main force units based in the western highlands region of South Vietnam are continuing to pursue a strategy of maneuver and attrition against allied forces operating in that area.

9. Since at least mid-February 1967, forces subordinate to the major Communist military command

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headquarters in the western highlands--variously referred to as the "B-3 Front," "Western Highland Front," and "Special Zone West"--have employed economy-of-force tactics emphasizing mortar attacks, mining of lines of communication, and harassment of allied units and installation. Frontal engagements, with the consequent risk of possibly heavy casualties from superior allied firepower, have been conspicuously avoided during this period.

10. The widespread pattern of enemy deployment in the western highlands--from the Plei Trap Valley in southwestern Kontum Province to Chu Pong Mountain in southwestern Pleiku Province--suggests a deliberate Communist attempt to force major US combat units into a significant expansion of their operational area along the Kontum/Pleiku/Cambodian border. By forcing an overextension of allied maneuver elements, the Communists probably hope to engage company-size or smaller allied troop units under tactically favorable circumstances. The strategy of forcing the allies to spread their forces thin would also serve to reduce the number of troops available for the defense of key allied installations in the area, thus making them even more vulnerable to Communist attack. Seven battalions of the US 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions are presently committed to Operation FRANCIS MARION along the Cambodian border in Kontum, Pleiku, and northern Darlac Province.

11. The "B-3 Front's" over-all tactical area of responsibility apparently includes parts of southern Laos and adjacent areas of Cambodia, as well as South Vietnam's Kontum, Pleiku, Darlac, and Phu Bon provinces. The front headquarters is located in the Cambodian/southwestern Kontum Province border area and presently controls five regiments, of which three--the 32nd, 33rd, and 66th--are subordinate to the 1st North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Division. The two additional regiments--the 88th and 95 "B"--were formerly subordinate to the 10th NVA Division which was recently dropped from MACV's enemy order of battle holdings because of insufficient hard

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[REDACTED]

evidence to confirm its continued existence. Both regiments now are accepted as directly subordinate to the "B-3 Front." The other confirmed major enemy main force unit operating in the western highlands--the 24th NVA regiment in central Kontum Province--maintains communications with both the "B-3 Front" and Military Region 5 headquarters, although its subordination to either entity remains unclear.

[REDACTED]

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Phan Khac Suu was re-elected as chairman of the Constituent Assembly on 14 April, polling a wide majority in contrast to his narrow margin last fall. The election of other assembly officers continued on the 15th and should be completed during the 17 April session. On the basis of preliminary evidence, the newly elected officers do not appear generally to represent any specific bloc or political group, but they seem to be the deputies who proved most capable during the drafting of the constitution.

2. The Democratic Alliance Bloc, the largest in the assembly and considered to be progovernment, was unsuccessful in attempts to win the chairmanships of either the assembly or the election law drafting committee. The newly elected leader of the press regulations committee is, however, a Democratic Alliance member as well as an ARVN lieutenant. A lawyer close to prominent assemblyman Phan Quang Dan won as the chairman of the strategic election law drafting committee, which has the task of spelling out the regulations governing the screening of candidates, the length of campaigns, and the facilities available to the candidates.

Viet Cong Pre-election Terrorism

3. Early reports indicate that the Viet Cong increased the tempo of their antielection activity prior to the commencement of the third Sunday of voting for village and hamlet administrators. Three lightly defended villages in the province of Long Khanh were simultaneously attacked at night shortly before the 16 April elections were scheduled to begin. A government relief force found one village one-third destroyed by fire, with the remainder burning and heavily booby-trapped. Five of the Revolutionary Development workers in the village were executed along with seven other civilians. Elsewhere in the

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country, a candidate for one of the village seats was reportedly assassinated. No reports on the final outcome of the elections are as yet available.

Dai Viet Party Electioneering

4. The Revolutionary Dai Viets--a central Vietnam nationalist political party which is backing Ha Thuc Ky for president--has started preparing its campaign strategy for both the presidential and legislative elections. Many of its plans, however, are contingent on a satisfactory interpretation of the regulations governing political parties which will be defined by the Constituent Assembly. If the guarantees for an open, loyal opposition are acceptable to the party's central committee, the party will become overt, using its present name.

5. The party has already assembled staffs to write campaign speeches and songs, and has dispatched former province and district officials who are covert party members to their old areas to act as propagandists, according to one member. A tentative list of candidates from all 44 of the provinces has been drawn up for the national assembly elections. Moreover, the Revolutionary Dai Viets who make up the nucleus of the Greater People's Bloc in the Constituent Assembly plan to conduct seminars on governmental issues and procedures, such as economic, education, and land reform policies, in hopes of winning more of the assembly deputies over to the bloc.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Current speculation among the diplomatic community in Hanoi concerning the purpose of North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong's recent trip to Moscow [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] According to one line of reasoning, Dong's trip was carried out in an attempt to acquire surface-to-surface missiles for use against the US warships which are bombing the North Vietnamese coast.

2. There is no additional information to corroborate this speculation. However, there has been evidence recently that the coastal shelling of the DRV has caused considerable damage in some areas and it might be logical for the Vietnamese to seek some additional form of military assistance with which to counter the naval bombardment. Pham Van Dong's last previous trip to Moscow occurred in August of last year, at which time he secured additional military assistance for the DRV. [REDACTED]

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

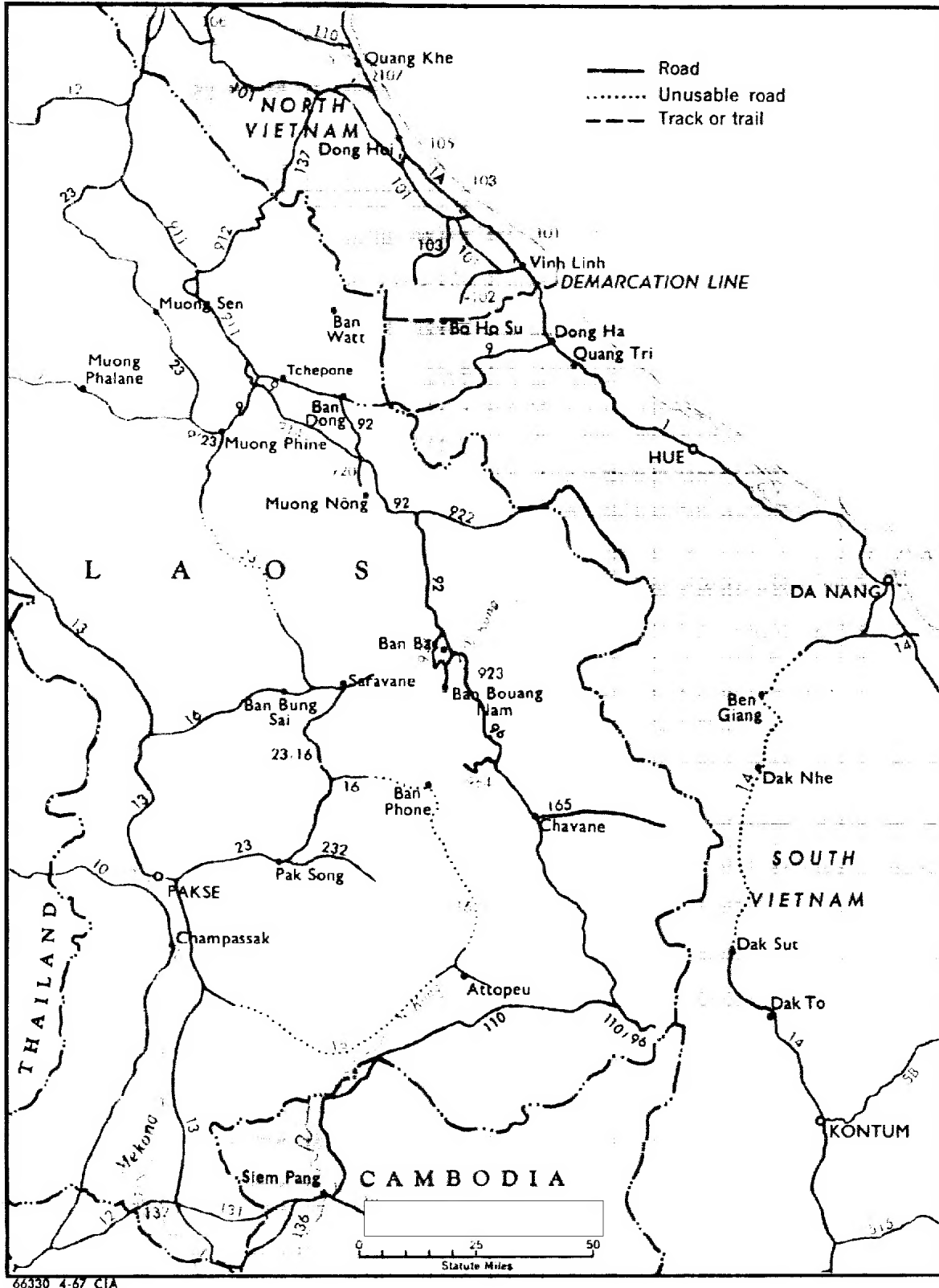
1. In a commentary in the party daily Nhan Dan broadcast on 16 April, Hanoi rejected terms for a possible settlement of the Vietnam war proposed by Canadian Secretary for External Affairs Paul Martin in a speech to the Canadian Parliament on 11 April. Martin's four-point proposal called for some degree of physical disengagement, a freeze on the course of military events at the present level, an end to all ground, air, and sea bombardments, and a return to the terms of the Geneva agreements.

2. Without mentioning Martin per se, the Hanoi commentary termed the "essence" of his proposal "a crafty scheme of the US imperialists on mutual de-escalation" which made no clear-cut distinction between the aggressor and those who oppose aggression." The commentary went on to revile recent US statements on possible negotiations as "perfidious tricks" and underscored the DRV's demand that the US stop "definitively and unconditionally" its bombing of the DRV "so that there might be talks between the two sides and so that a solution might be found to the Vietnam problem."

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LAOS PANHANDLE



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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The Communists are preparing roads in the Laos panhandle for the rainy season which is due to begin in five or six weeks. According to MACV reports of early April, portions of routes 23, 92, 96, and 110 had been corduroyed, i.e., paved with cross pieces of logs. Additional logs have been stacked by the sides of roads, and some bypasses have been constructed over high ground to provide improved drainage.

2. These efforts are much more widespread than similar preparations noted in past rainy seasons, during which truck traffic throughout the panhandle dropped to a trickle and supplies for Communist forces probably had to be drawn from stockpiles within the panhandle and portered into South Vietnam. A significant amount of truck traffic in the panhandle might be possible during the coming rainy season if intensive preparations against flooding and washouts are carried out in the next five to six weeks and if repair crews stayed on the job throughout the season.

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